Choate Mourns Its Student 'Most Likely To Succeed'

WALLINGFORD — The student voted "most likely to succeed" by the Choate School class of 1935 achieved that distinction by becoming the 36th president of the United States.

John F. Kennedy, honored by his 105 classmates, was remembered as a confident classmate who had never been outstanding in a varsity sport, never held a class office and was not an outstanding student.

The Rev. Dr. Seymour St. John, choate headmaster, declared:

"On this tragic day, we can only say a prayer for Jack Kennedy, for his family and our country. For all three we are sick at heart.

"Perhaps not for weeks or months will America recognize how much it was given by Kennedy, how great is its loss. Regardless of party, of politics or personalities we have had a President who stood by his convictions, in the strength of which the free world has felt proud and secure.

"In this very hour," St. John said, "he had planned to say American leadership must be guided by learning and reason. May we have the wisdom and courage to carry forward this torch which he has passed to us."

"Courage of Convictions"

His onetime football coach and housemaster, Earl Lienbach, remembered the younger Kennedy as one who was "never at a loss for words . . . always a boy who had the courage of his convictions."

He was the left tackle on Choate's undefeated "150-pound football team of 1933. Lienbach described him as a "fighter."

"He was not an All-American by any means," his former coach recalled, "but he made up for lack of native ability with great determination."

"He was light as a football player, but he was a typical Irishman as far as fight was concerned," said Leinbach.

"I feel very sorry for his wife and for the country."

On the wall behind Leinbach as he spoke was a photo from the late President with the inscription "To 'Cappy' Leinbach, With Best Wishes and Regards, Jack Kennedy."

Average at Start

"As a student," Leinbach said, "he was a typical boy and worked just enough to get by He was an average student. This continued until the end of his second year at Harvard. Then he got under way and revealed the intellectual brilliance that resulted in his graduating cum laude."

Kennedy lived in an adjoining room to Leinbach. He spoke frequently with him and often had dinner with him in the company of other boys.

"Even as a youngster," Leinbach said, "he had the courage of his convictions and if he thought he was right he stood up for them with all his might. A lot of people have asked me if I thought he would become president and I must say that I never thought he would. But he was voted the boy most likely to succeed by his classmates. He was very popular with both classmates and teachers here at Choate.

"The last time he was here at school was in 1960 when he received the outstanding alumnus award."

Flair for Writing

"I know English teacher Harold Tinker, now retired, thought he had a fine flair for writing even though he was a poor speller."

Benjamin Sylvester, public relations director at Choate, said, "Everyone is in a state of shock. It's like the death of President Roosevelt. I know he always regarded Choate with fondness."

Known as "Jack" or "Ken" to his classmates, young Kennedy is remembered by Wallingford residents riding his bike through town and stopping at the old Foote Shop on Center Street for ice cream.

His most successful academic subject was English, although history was probably his favorite. He was always fond of writing and moved by history, according to Harold Tinker, his former English literature master.

Tinker remembered him as "bright, clever shrewd . . . with a good sense of fun and good-natured devilry."

Back as Senator

In 1958, the then-senator returned to Choate — this time to become the first recipient of the school's highest honor, the Alumni Seal Prize.

Among those who knew President Kennedy when he was a student of Choate School was Raymond V. Darling of 520 Carriage Dr., Orange, who was graduated with the President in 1935.

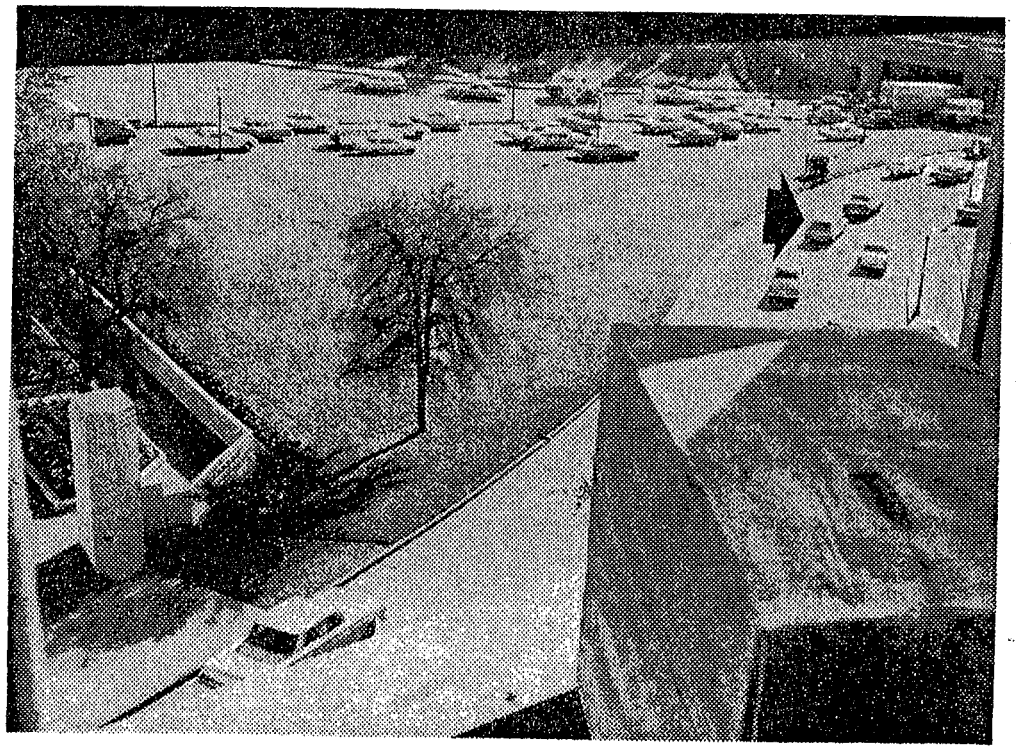
Darling, executive vice president of the Birmingham Bank in Derby, visited the Kennedy summer home in Hyannis Port in 1934, there playing tennis and boating with the President.

Darling last spoke to the President when, as Sen. Kennedy, he visited Choate in 1958.

"My family and I visited the White House in August, 1963, when we were living in Wallingford. We missed him. But when we returned, we found a letter written by him in which the President said he was sorry he'd missed us and hoped our visit had been pleasant. We still have the letter."

"I was attracted to him and so was everyone else who knew him," said John Norton of 101 Maplewood Avenue, Wallingford, Friday evening about the late president.

"He was shy in a way because his father was so well known and everyone knew Jack was very wealthy," Norton, a classmate of Kennedy's, said. He had classes at Choate in French and public speaking and played two years of football with the President.



IT WAS FROM this window that a sniper asssassinated President Kennedy and injured Texas Gov. John Connally. The President's car was in the upper-right hand corner (arrow).